

How to Advocate for a Better Child Care System

A Step-by-Step Guide

by Lynette M. Fraga and Anne Hedgepeth

Our real-life and authentic experiences and personal passions for the change we are seeking are the most powerful and influential tools in our advocacy toolbox. Embracing the power of our own voices, recognizing the importance of our stories and amplifying those of others, and strategically directing our concerns to our elected officials can be game-changing.

Since the start of the pandemic last winter, Child Care Aware® of America and many other organizations have



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been collecting stories from child care providers and parents across the country about how the pandemic has affected them. These personal stories are among the most effective ways to advocate for child care with policymakers and the media. As a new Congress and state legislatures convene in 2021, policymakers want to hear your stories, so they can be informed about your needs and the challenges you are facing. This can be done either in-person (when it is safe to do so) or virtually. Virtual meetings are an effective way for early childhood educators and families to meet with policymakers and share their experiences, all from the comfort and safety of their own homes. Setting up a successful meeting—whether virtual or in-person—can be done in just a few easy steps.

Schedule a virtual meeting. Start with finding your legislators and contact information using CCAoA's Find Your Legislator tool. Connect with the district office through a brief email or phone call. If calling, ask to speak with the scheduler or another staff lead on child care, in order to set up the meeting. If sending an email, keep it

brief: include your name and address to show that you are a constituent, the issue you intend to discuss, and several dates you are available to meet. You can also visit the websites of Members of Congress and use the "Request a Meeting" form available from most members.

Do not be discouraged if you do not hear back right away. You may have to contact the legislator's office a few times to get a response. Allow at least one business day in between follow-ups. For more tips on setting up a meeting, including sample email language, check out CCAoA's Advocacy from Home Toolkit.

Do your homework. Before the call or virtual meeting, familiarize yourself with the policymaker, in order to get an idea of their stance on child care. This can include reading their bio, committee assignments, and legislative record—this is key so you can be sure to thank them for their support on an issue. Even if you're familiar with your state legislators or congressional delegation, it helps to conduct quick research to see if they have taken a strong stance on child care in press

releases or on social media. Before your meeting, create talking points and familiarize yourself with them. You will have them available as a prompt, but it is better to avoid reading from them directly if possible. Plan to join the video or conference call promptly. If you are running late, send an email or call the staff you are meeting with.

Have a focused conversation. Begin your call or meeting by thanking the legislator and/or staff for taking time to meet with you, followed by quick introductions of yourself and anyone else present in the group. Share your connection to the legislator’s district and/or state and give a quick background about your relationship with the child care system.

After introductions, focus on a specific message, avoid unnecessary acronyms, and support your stories with data using resources like CCAoA’s Picking up the Pieces report. Personalize the conversation by sharing your stories as a parent or provider, as well as any challenges regarding child care in your community. Relating a specific experience or story puts a face on the issue you are discussing so that it “sticks” with the member or staff. If you are unsure of the best answer to a question, it is completely acceptable (and a smart political move) to say, “I’m not sure, let me find out and get back to you.” This gives you an opportunity to follow-up and stay in touch. Remember, you are the expert in the meeting on child care issues.

This is a good time to share any materials you brought. A simple one-page summary of your organization, the issues you plan to discuss, the policy ask, and contact information make a great resource to leave behind.

End with a specific ask. Make a specific request and let them know you will be following up with them

on it. This is true whether you are educating the legislator on child care in your community or advocating for a specific policy. Some examples can be to schedule a site visit, support legislation, or to increase funding to child care to rebuild the system. Just in case your meeting is unexpectedly cut short, prepare a two-minute elevator pitch that summarizes your most important talking points and your direct ask. As you end your meeting, let the policy-makers know that you can be a source of information and that you want to be helpful to them in the future. Be sure to share your contact information with those in the meeting.

Follow up and share on social media. After your meeting, send a thank you note (email is great for this) to everyone you met with, and include a reminder of your ask. Follow up on any requests made during the call or meeting. Do not forget to share on social media—make sure you tweet and post about your experiences to spread the word, and inspire others to get involved and engaged.

This meeting is just the first step in the long-term strategy to build a relationship with your legislator and gain support for quality child care. Families and communities around the country are counting on us to fight for their child care in this moment, so know that the actions you’re taking now really matter. Our government works best when people get involved and use their voices. By meeting with your representatives—even virtually—you are making a big difference.

Connect with a local, state or national advocacy organization. Child Care Aware of America, for example, has multiple ways to connect to a national movement with templates, toolkits, and ways to take action!

Resources from Child Care Aware of America

Advocacy resource page:
childcareaware.org/our-issues/advocacy/

Picking Up the Pieces report:
childcareaware.org/pieces

Find Your Legislator tool:
childcareaware.org/our-issues/public-policy/find-your-legislator/

Advocacy from Home Toolkit:
childcareaware.org/our-issues/advocacy/day-on-the-hill-advocacy-toolkit/